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*The advantages of religious
Knowledge.*

A
S E R M O N

PREACHED IN

ST. THOMAS'S,

JANUARY 1. 1756.

For the Benefit of the

CHARITY-SCHOOL

In *Gravel-Lane, Southwark.*

By A. K I P P I S. *K*

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The *Journal of*
Knowledge

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PREPARED BY

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For the Benefit of the

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In Great Lane, Westminster.

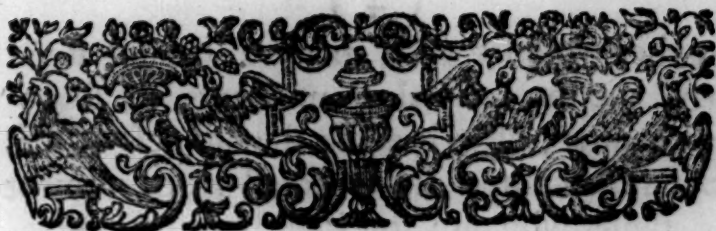
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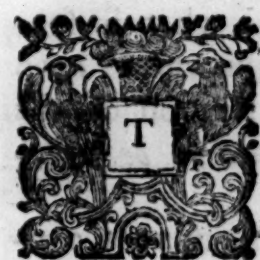
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PROVERBS XIX. 2. former part.

Also, that the soul be without knowledge, it is not good.



THE truth of this assertion is so evident at first sight, that it will scarce by any one be called in question. But the unhappiness is, that there is frequently a shameful inconsistency between the professed principles and the practices of men. However readily they may in words agree with the observation of *Solomon* in the text; yet if we consult their conduct, and not their lips, we shall be almost inclined to imagine, that no sentiment can be farther from their Hearts. For do we not behold the human race eager for the acquisition of any thing, rather than Knowledge? Riches are sought after with the utmost diligence, anxiety, and toil; sensual pleasure is purchased at the expence of health, fortune, and reputation; and ambition is pursued

by her votaries with many a painful step; nay, the most trivial amusements, the slightest vanities, often become the business of life. But how comparatively small is the number of those who are solicitous for the cultivation of their minds, and an improvement in the wisdom which leads to salvation! While therefore we see men acting so contrary to acknowledged truths, it will be useful to resume and enforce the plainest subjects; not so much with a design to convince the judgment, as to make, if possible, an impression on the imagination; and to rouse the insensible into a practical feeling of what in speculation they allow. With this view I have at present pitched on the declaration of the royal Moralist, that for *the soul to be without knowledge, it is not good.*

These words are capable of different constructions; but as the version given in our Translation is very rational, and entirely agreeable to the Original; I shall, without further preface, endeavour

- I. To point out the kind of knowledge, which is peculiarly important and necessary.
- II. Shew on what accounts it is not good for the soul to be without knowledge. And,
- III. Conclude with some practical Inferences.

I. I am to point out the kind of Knowledge, which is peculiarly important and necessary. There are various Arts and Sciences, and a great number of things, on which the regulation or enjoyment of common life principally depends. With these, or some of these, according to our different Situations, it is indispensably requisite that every one of us be acquainted. Whatever be the lot assigned us by Providence, we are not exempted from certain offices and duties, which demand proportionable degrees of wisdom, in order to their being discharged with propriety and credit: and with regard to such as are in a low or middle station, it is incumbent upon them to be instructed in a particular trade, employment, or profession, in which they are obliged to excel, as much as they can. Independent likewise, of the skill we are bound to acquire in our separate callings, the general improvement of the mind should be an object of our warm and earnest attention. We cannot possibly go through the world with any tolerable reputation or advantage, unless we understand the rules of prudent behaviour: and it is of the highest importance to obtain that sound way of judging with relation to common events and appearances, which constitutes good sense; a quality, incomparably superior to a load of indigested learning. It will also, if we are favoured with opportunity, ability, and leisure,

sure, be extremely desirable and useful, to take extensive views of men and things. The works and laws of Nature, the affections and operations of the human breast, history ecclesiastical and civil, the constitution and government of our own Country, the compositions of ingenious Authors, the liberal and polite arts, are all of them subjects that richly deserve, and will richly reward our industrious Inquiry.

But the Knowledge chiefly intended by *Solomon*, as is evident from the signification of the word in other places, and from the manner of expression used in the Text, is religious Knowledge. It is that Knowledge which in a peculiar sense it is not good for the Soul to be without; and which directs us in the path of immortal felicity. To this we shall now confine our meditations: and may observe,

1. That we should be acquainted with the great principles and duties of natural Religion. And here the grand, the fundamental point is to entertain just sentiments concerning the ever-blessed God. It is plain from a survey of the beauty, contrivance, and extent of the Universe, that there exists an eternal, independent, and Almighty Being, by whom it was created: and it is equally plain that this Being is perfect in wisdom, and boundless in goodness. Upon farther examination it will appear, that he continues to direct

direct the worlds he hath made; and that he stands in several important and endearing relations towards his rational Off-spring, which demand suitable returns of gratitude, obedience, and love. The Characters he sustains as our Author, Preserver, Friend, and Father; as our Inspector, Lawgiver, and final Judge; do all of them require correspondent affections, and lay us under an indispensable obligation to a correspondent behaviour. It is therefore absolutely necessary to form right opinions in these respects: for unless we are in some measure instructed in the Nature, Attributes, Providence, and moral Government of God, together with the worship and duty he expects at our hands; we shall err at the very foundation, and become the eternal slaves of ignorance, idolatry, superstition or wickedness. With the Knowledge of the Deity, should be joined a proper insight into our own frame, and the purposes for which our faculties were bestowed. We may be well assured, that the great Former of our spirits had valuable ends in view, when He placed us on the earth. If we consider these ends with reference only to this life, it will be found the design of the Almighty, that we provide as happily as we can for the accommodation of the body; that we particularly attend to the cultivation of the mind; and above all, that we act the equitable, the social, and the generous part,

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in the whole of our intercourse, with our fellow-creatures. Nor is our duration limited by death and the grave. All our instincts and capacities, all the conduct of our Maker in his administration of things below; proclaim the immortality of the Soul, and declare that its future bliss is inseparably connected with its present attainment and virtues. But what will it avail to be endued with the noblest powers, and created for the most worthy purposes, if at the same time we are unacquainted with the intentions of our existence, and the methods of complying with them? It is therefore of the utmost importance, to understand what is the part we are ordained to act, with respect either to this or the other world. We should know the characters we are appointed to sustain in life; the dispositions in which our highest excellence consists; the duties we owe to God, to Society, and to our Selves; and the qualifications that will fit us for the divine approbation hereafter. To a Knowledge of the great Truths of natural Religion, should be added likewise an acquaintance with the foundations they rest upon, and the evidences on which they are supported. The several arguments which prove the existence and perfections of the supreme Being, the obligations of virtue, and a state of future rewards and punishments, do well deserve a diligent inquiry. And since it is

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extremely difficult, at least for the generality of Mankind, to form an exact system of sacred Principles, without the assistance of immediate discoveries from Heaven ; it must be very desirable to possess any Scheme that affords peculiar advantages for directing our steps. Which leads me to take notice.

2. That we should understand the contents of the christian Revelation. If our heavenly Father hath been so benevolent as to give his Creatures some extraordinary information of his will, it should certainly be received with abundant gratitude. Now this he hath actually done. He was graciously pleased to lead men by the hand from the beginning of the world ; and manifested to the *Jews* such displays of his unity and supremacy, such copious rules of worship and obedience, as filled their souls with valuable Knowledge. But it is our felicity to enjoy still brighter instructions ; instructions which it highly concerns us to be acquainted with. The children of men, notwithstanding the light which shone around them, had suffered their minds to be involved in darkness and error. Though the Deity continually spoke to them in the grandeur, beauty, and beneficence of his creation, in the course of his Providence, and in their own moral and immortal faculties, yet he spoke to them in vain. Such however were the unparalleled riches of his grace, that the disregard which

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had been paid to his former lectures of Wisdom did not prevent his sending at length the Lord *Jesus Christ* upon the earth, to become the Messenger of truth and happiness. In consequence of what our Saviour hath taught, all the great branches of natural religion are set before us without the trouble of laborious researches. Nor are they only set before us with perspicuity, and published in a fairer edition, but are enforced by a mighty authority; even the authority of the Son of God, commissioned by the Father. We are called to the practice of Goodness by new and prevailing arguments. Virtue in the life of *Jesus* hath been rendered visible to the eye; and hath assumed an appearance inexpressibly engaging and lovely. We are encouraged to persevere in righteousness, by being assured of an assistance from the holy Spirit: and our obedience is animated by the most forcible Sanctions; sanctions that are addressed to every principle of our frame; and are calculated either to shake the heart with terrour, or to draw it with the gentlest ties of affection. Several important particulars are likewise in the new Testament fully revealed and ascertained, which the utmost efforts of human Reason were not able to reach. Whatever probability that might have given of the divine benignity to transgressors, it could not have placed the delightful truth in such strong colours, as the sufferings,

ferings, death, and resurrection of the Redeemer have done ; which have afforded a most illustrious, joyful, and amazing picture of the essential placability of God, and his tenderness to sinners. And though it be indeed true that a future state is pointed out by the light of nature, yet the light of nature could never inform us of such a glorious, unmerited, eternal reward, as the Gospel exhibits.

Since therefore the christian Revelation is enriched with the stores of the most precious Knowledge, to that we should have recourse ; and from thence should draw enlarged, and honourable, and endearing representations of the ever-blessed Deity. From thence we should imbibe the sentiments of a rational and manly devotion. From thence we should be instructed how to regulate our temper and our actions. From thence we should take the examples of a genuine excellence in life and manners. From thence we should learn the mediation of Christ, and the method in which offenders may through him be reconciled to God. From thence we should derive the most sacred influences, the most powerful motives, and the most ravishing expectations. We should acquaint ourselves with the Scriptures ; make them the object of our frequent perusal, and attentive study ; and spare no pains to understand their real meaning. We should in an especial manner take care to have right

Views with regard to the design and spirit of the gospel. It ought to be considered by us not as a system of speculations, but as an Act of Grace to a degenerate world ; and as a divine Philosophy, which is intended to purify and sweeten our dispositions, to enlarge our benevolent affections, to fill our hearts with peace and joy, and to give us an increasing resemblance to the Father of light, perfection and bliss.

As likewise we exist at a period of time, in which the supernatural authority of our holy Religion is disbelieved or doubted by great numbers, it is of peculiar importance for us, not only to know its general contents, but the arguments which prove it to come from God. The dark and corrupted state of mankind when *Jesus* appeared ; the inward excellence of his doctrines and precepts ; his uncommon, illustrious, and divine Character, a Character which the genius of *Homer* or *Milton* could not have invented and supported, much less such weak persons as the Apostles originally were ; the strongest historical evidence ; the accomplishment of Prophecies ; the performance of mighty Miracles ; the speedy and amazing success of the christian Revelation, do all concur to shew, that its voice is the voice alone of celestial Wisdom. Into these things it behoves us therefore, as our opportunities permit, to inquire ; that we may (a) be able to give
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(a) 1 Pet. iii. 15.

a reason of the hope that is in us, when we are called to vindicate our sacred profession. Once more,

3. It is a very necessary part of Knowledge, that we become acquainted with the grounds of the Protestant Reformation. This is a matter of vast moment in the present age of the world: for a Scheme hath arisen that pretends to be founded in Christianity, but in fact destroys it: a scheme which is a complication of every thing that is absurd, and every thing that is wicked. I need not tell you, that this dreadful Scheme is Popery. Upon examination it will appear that its doctrines are a most daring insult on scripture, reason, and common sense; that its principles are dangerous and destructive; that its worship is a monstrous heap of superstition, and idolatry; that its practices are wretched and diabolical; that its tendency is fatal both to the bodies and the souls of the human race. In short, it is such a mixture of impudence, fraud, folly, and impiety; that its mighty prevalence is a just cause for unspeakable amazement, and reflects indelible disgrace on the history of man. At the same time that the supporters of this detestable System have lost the nature, spirit, and essence of the Gospel, they have authoritatively condemned others, and dared to call themselves the only members of the Church of Christ. Popery is a corruption so bold in its pretensions,

sions, and hath spread so wide: it is so ruinous to humanity, to liberty, to every thing which deserves to be valued by us as rational, social, and religious creatures, that it is of the utmost importance to be guarded against it. For otherwise, while we call ourselves after the name of the amiable Jesus, we may in truth be worse than Pagans, and substitute the most shocking enormities for genuine piety. We should therefore be instructed how different the tenets and claims of the Roman See, are from whatever is found in the new Testament. We should know that the doctrines of real Christianity are clear and rational, its worship pure and simple, its temper mild and beneficent, its intention noble, and divine. We should be thoroughly grounded in the solid principles on which the Reformation is built: especially should we understand and assert our absolute right to read, study, and interpret the sacred writings for ourselves; our unalienable title to private judgment, together with the hatefulness of persecution to God and Man.

Thus I have mentioned the kind of Knowledge, which is peculiarly important and necessary; and have observed that it is the Knowledge of Religion, as contained in an acquaintance with the great principles and duties of the Law of Nature, the contents of the christian Scheme, and the foundations of our separation from Popery. In
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this representation I have had respect to the situation of things in our own country, and to the advantages that we have the happiness to enjoy. For the same degree of wisdom which may justly be expected from us, cannot be expected from those who are not favoured with the same opportunities. The righteous and benevolent Governor of the Universe, will demand no more from any of his creatures, than he hath given them ability to perform. And all who improve in the best manner the light they are blessed with, be that light more or less, will undoubtedly receive the approbation of their Maker.

I now proceed,

II. To shew on what Accounts it is not good for the Soul to be without Knowledge, especially the Knowledge of Religion. And

1. Knowledge is in itself a most excellent and desirable qualification: It is so necessary to every valuable purpose, that the great author of our frame did not leave men indifferent about it, but implanted a strong passion for it in the breast; and made it appear agreeable and charming, independent of the advantages with which it is otherwise attended. This hath been taken notice of, and elegantly displayed by the best Pagan Philosophers. *Solomon* likewise asserts that (b) *through desire a man seeketh and intermeddleth with*

(b) *Prov. xviii. 1.*

with all wisdom. And in another place he hath told us, that (c) *a man shall be commended according to his wisdom.* This is indeed conformable to the general sentiments of mankind. For what can be more evident, than that a person possessed of an enlightened understanding, is always regarded with a certain veneration and esteem; while voluntary ignorance and stupidity are treated with contempt? Not all the lustre of a noble birth, not all the affluence of wealth, not all the pomp of titles, not all the splendour of power can give dignity to a Soul that is destitute of inward improvement. In that case the glare of external things will only add a greater conspicuity to folly, and render it doubly ridiculous. Well may Knowledge be looked upon as a real excellence, since it is one of the grand points by which we are distinguished from the Brutes, and hold an honourable rank in the creation of God.

By this we are allied to Angels, claim kindred with the blessed Deity himself, and are capable of rising for ever in the scale of beings. Such is its inherent worth, that it hath always been represented under the most pleasing images. In particular it hath been compared to Light, the most valuable and reviving part of nature's works; and to that glorious Luminary, which is the most beautiful and transporting object our eyes behold.

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If we entertain any doubts concerning the intrinsic value of religious Knowledge, let us look around us, and we shall be fully convinced how desirable it is to be acquainted with God, with spiritual, with eternal things. Observe the difference between a cultivated and a barren Country. While the former is a lovely, chearful, and delightful sight, the other administers a spectacle of Horrour, There is an equal difference between the Nations among whom rational and manly principles of piety prevail, and the Nations that are overrun with idolatry, superstition, and error. Was it not the superior wisdom of *Socrates*, that hath rendered him the glory of the Pagan, and the admiration of the Christian World? How divinely excellent doth our Lord appear in this respect; who treated the sublimest subjects with the utmost freedom, ease and dignity; and spoke with an understanding, energy, and grace, that charmed and astonished his Hearers!

2. It is not good for the Soul to be without Knowledge, because Knowledge is of great importance to our personal and private felicity. Happiness is what we every one of us aim at, in the whole of our actions: and the desire of it is so essential to our nature, that it cannot be eradicated without destroying the first principles of our mental Frame. But what signify our wishes for this invaluable jewel, if we know not where it lies, or

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in what objects it is to be met with? Our conduct is regulated by our opinions: it is therefore necessary in order to attain the blessedness we long for, to form right views concerning the method by which it may be acquired. Now this method is pointed out to us by an acquaintance with the dictates of Religion. (d) *He that getteth Wisdom, saith Solomon, loveth his own Soul; he that keepeth Understanding, shall find good.* The pursuit of Knowledge is in itself extremely conducive to felicity. It furnishes a pleasure that cannot be met with in the possession of inferior enjoyments; a fine entertainment, which adds a relish to prosperity, and alleviates the hour of distress. It throws a lustre on greatness, and reflects an honour upon poverty. The person who applies his heart to sacred instruction, hath secured a rational and agreeable employment, that will prevent his having recourse to folly or vice. He will experience a sublime delight in surmounting difficulties, and making a continual progress in the stock of his ideas. And when he hath actually arrived to a System of solid principles, a self-possession and dignity will thence accrue to his mind, which greatly contribute to inward satisfaction. How different is the condition of the wretch who is the slave of ignorance and folly! His time will frequently hang heavy on his hands; he will be a burden to himself; and should sickness or

(d) *Prov. xix. 8.*

or adversity take away the power of running from amusement to amusement, he will have nothing that can relieve an anxious heart, or support the weakness of his spirits. The Knowledge we are speaking of, hath a beneficial influence on our outward circumstances as well as our internal peace. While it is infinitely more valuable than riches or power, it hath a tendency to increase our temporal prosperity. For it instructs us to acquire those dispositions and virtues, which in the general course of things, will be followed by competence, health, credit, esteem, and many other blessings.

It is indeed the property of religious Wisdom, so to regulate our conduct in all respects, as shall best advance our truest happiness. We are surrounded by a variety of snares, and called to a variety of duties: a part is assigned for each of us to act: there are often particular difficulties that demand the exertion of our whole skill: and our welfare depends on the manner in which we sustain the character appointed us by God. What then could we do without suitable information of the method in which it is incumbent upon us to behave? We see that the ignorant fall into perpetual error and misery. They have either no principles at all, or else their minds become an easy prey to the delusion of false ones; the consequence of which is, that they are bewildered

and lost in the path of life. But those who are directed by sacred instruction, understand the way in which they should go.

The Knowledge they are endued with, enlarges the mind ; and teaches them a proper temper and deportment, with regard to the supreme Being, themselves, and their fellow creatures. It calls them to Devotion, temperance, justice, meekness, and benevolence. It points out what they should be as masters and servants, husbands and wives, parents and children : and qualifies them to discharge every relation with honour, satisfaction, and advantage. Nay, it will, even in common concerns, where capacities and other opportunities are equal, make them wiser than their neighbours. For an acquaintance with Scripture will furnish the head with many prudential maxims ; and the thoughtful turn which piety inspires, will be very favourable to a sedate and judicious estimate of things.

Should it however happen in the course of events, that our present enjoyments utterly fail ; spiritual Wisdom will not be at a loss to inform us where felicity may be obtained. It will tell us not to place it, in wealth, in pleasure, in vanity, in titles, or in splendour ; but in a superiority to the world, in a Soul that is raised above distress, in the harmony and kindness of our affections, in the applauding voice of conscience, and

and in the approbation of our Maker. It will instruct us to consider afflictions, as preparatory to a future state; and to fix our dependance and our bliss on joys that are refined, exalted, and durable.

3. It is not good to be without Knowledge, because Knowledge will render us useful members of society. That our heavenly Father doth not intend us to seek our own happiness only, is plain from a variety of arguments. Nay, he hath not left us to learn our duty to our fellow-creatures from the slow deductions of reason; but hath implanted kind and tender Instincts in the breast, which by a sweet compulsion oblige us to mourn with those who mourn, and to rejoice with them that rejoice; which declare that we are intimately united with the whole System of Beings: and urge us to exert our endeavours for the welfare of the human race. But even our benevolence may lead us astray, if it is not regulated by the dictates of Wisdom. Shall we not find in fact, that a deluded ignorance hath often been spreading misery in the earth, while it believed itself actuated by a regard to the honour of God, and the interests of Men. It is therefore of the utmost importance to acquire that just way of thinking, which will prevent the misapplication of our affections, and direct them to their proper objects. Be our abilities and influence great
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or small, be our station in life high or low, Knowledge will instruct us to apply our several talents, in that manner which shall be most conducive to the benefit of mankind. It will alike teach the Subject and the Magistrate, how to advance the publick good. Nor will it merely qualify us to discharge our own parts in society, with usefulness: it will also make us capable of advising and regulating others. Hence we may become the lights of the world; and may diffuse those beneficent beams around us, which shall shine on benighted Travellers, and discover the path of rectitude and bliss.

It is likewise one of the capital advantages derived from Knowledge, that it tends to destroy the Bigotry which hath in all ages been so fatal to human happiness. That Bigotry is the child of Ignorance, will be evident to any one who attentively considers the matter. For were men acquainted with the nature of God, they would be well assured, that an All-gracious Being could never condemn his creatures for the variation of their opinions, so long as they sincerely endeavoured to find out his will. Did they understand the amiable spirit of the Gospel, they would perceive that nothing can be more contrary to its design, than to exclude any from the benefits it proposes, who are solicitous to imbibe its temper, and comply with its precepts. Had they examined their
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own Hearts, they would learn that while we are liable to such abundant weakness and error, it is the height of arrogance to judge with severity our fellow-men. Did they comprehend the real difficulty that attends many Questions, and the plausible things that may frequently be urged on both sides, they would be fully convinced that the wise and good may differ in their views. Did they know the world, they would experience so much piety and virtue among persons of very opposite Sentiments, as would enlarge their souls, and fill them with a warm and diffusive charity.

The same Knowledge which is thus happily effectual to drive away Bigotry, puts to flight likewise the meanness of superstition, and the madness of Enthusiasm. It corrects every unworthy notion of God and Religion; exposes the principles and practices, that have been so ruinous to the order and well-being of society; teaches us to place the ardour of our zeal on objects alone that deserve it; and promotes the cause of universal Liberty. If we desire to behold the dreadful consequences of ignorance with regard to divine things, it is but casting our Eyes a little on the History of Mankind; where we shall meet with such instances of Folly and Fraud, of Barbarity and Persecution, as will strike us with horror. It is owing to the prevalence of rational opinions in these respects,
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that *Great Britain* is delivered from the most terrible calamities; that it is the seat of so much tranquility and social bliss, that the sacred rights of conscience are held inviolable; and that every person is permitted to exert the freedom of his mind, without the fear of penalties and tortures.

It would be impossible in the bounds of our present Discourse, to enumerate all the blessings that flow from religious Knowledge. To this we are indebted for the important change, which hath been made since the beginning of the Reformation. To this we are indebted for the humanity and gentleness of modern manners. To this we are indebted for the general cultivation and refinement of the understandings of men. It is owing to this, that even arbitrary Governments seem to have lost something of their original ferocity; and that there is a source of improvement in Europe, which will, we hope, in future times, shed the most delightful influences on society; and unite its members in harmony, peace, and love. Once more,

4. It is not good for the Soul to be without Knowledge, because Knowledge points out to us an eternal felicity. *(e) Understanding*, says the wise man, *is a well-spring of life to him that bath it*; and what he hath here spoke with reference, it may be, to this world alone, may justly be applied to another.

(e) Prov. xvi. 22.

other. The several branches of human Science are intended only to bless and adorn our present existence: but religious Knowledge bids us provide for an immortal being, sets the path of salvation before us, and is our inseparable companion in the road to glory. It is so essentially necessary to our final welfare, that without some degree of acquaintance with it, the soul must be utterly undone. As it instructs us in the way to endless bliss, so it will survive that mighty day, when all worldly Literature and Accomplishments shall for ever cease. At that solemn Period in which the Records and Registers of Men shall be destroyed, the Systems of human Policy be dissolved, and the grandest works of Genius die, the Wisdom which is spiritual and heavenly, shall not only subsist, but be increased to an extent, that human nature cannot in this life admit. Of this the Apostle gives a beautiful Representation, 1 Cor. xiii. 12. *For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face; now I know in part; but then shall I know, even as also I am known.* Our views of things are at present obscure, imperfect, partial, and liable to error. But when we arrive to the realms of everlasting Light, the clouds that shadowed our understanding will be removed; we shall behold with amazing clearness, the Attributes, Ways, and Works of
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God; shall perceive more distinctly the design of his Dispensations; shall trace with rapture the wonders of Nature and Grace; and become acquainted with a thousand glorious Objects, of which the imagination can as yet have no conception.

Such are the consequences that result from the Knowledge of Religion. It delivers us from that eternal death, to which an ignorance of divine truths leaves the mind continually exposed. It prepares us to be inhabitants of the celestial regions, to improve for ever in moral excellence, to acquire a dignity perpetually increasing, to be associates with Angels, to sit down with the Redeemer on his throne, and to be always advancing in a nearer and nearer resemblance to the great Original of Beauty, Perfection and Blessedness.

What words then can sufficiently express its importance and necessity? Every argument, every consideration concurs to prove the assertion of the Text, *that for the Soul to be without Knowledge, it is not good.*

I am now,

III. To conclude with some practical inferences. And,

I. Since the Knowledge of Religion is so extremely valuable, it behoves us to be thankful, that we are favoured with such
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abundant means of attaining it. That God did not esteem it good for the human Soul to be without Knowledge, appears from the various methods he hath taken, in order to fill it with sacred Instruction. He has addressed his rational Offspring by every thing within them, and every thing without them : He hath by all his Dispensations, whether in the natural or the moral world, read them a continued lecture of Wisdom. He hath spoken to each of us in the wonders and beauties of the Creation, in the admirable order of his Providence, in the present rewards and punishments of Virtue and Vice, in the powers of Reason, and the dictates of Conscience. But besides these general ways, in which the Almighty hath called his Creatures to an acquaintance with their duty, he has added the clear, the commanding voice of Revelation ; and by his dear Son hath shone upon us in a most illustrious and copious manner. Animated with a warm, with an unconquerable zeal to diffuse Knowledge and Happiness among the Children of Men, the Redeemer came upon the earth ; and hath given such lessons of truth and piety, as may justly be deemed the richest treasure we can possess. Now it is our felicity to enjoy all these advantages in their full perfection. We do not live under the law of Nature alone, but under the law

of *Jesus* likewise. Nor are we merely dignified with the name of being the Saviour's disciples. Vast numbers there are who assume this Appellation, while at the same time they are totally ignorant of the design and spirit of our holy Religion. But it is our blessing to partake of the Gospel as it is in itself; to partake of it, free from Corruption, Superstition, and Priestcraft. We are Christians, Protestants, *Britons*. Our benefits under all these Characters, have been continued to us through repeated opposition; and we are entire possessors of them at this very day. Our situation is delightful above that of any other Nation under Heaven. Can we then, at this opening of the new Year, behold each other thus assembled together, surrounded as we are with all the gifts of Providence and Grace, without the most fervent thankfulness to that benevolent Being, who hath commanded light about us; and all is light? With what gratitude, with what admiration, with what affection should it inspire us, when we consider his boundless goodness! Not to be sensible of such mercies, would argue a disposition void of moral feelings. We should therefore praise Him in the warmest strains, for the notices he hath spread around us, of our spiritual, our immortal interests. We should especially praise Him for the discoveries of his Grace,
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in our Lord and Saviour, *Jesus Christ*. Nor should we ever forget to unite our songs of joy, that we are favoured with all the advantages of that Reformation, which next to the manifestation of the Redeemer, is the most important and happy event in the History of mankind.

2. We should each of us be solicitous to improve in Knowledge. Not to do so in the present Age, will undoubtedly subject us to indelible Reproach. The same degree of ignorance which in former Times might pass uncensured, would now be treated with the utmost contempt. Nay, without some considerable skill in the principles we maintain, and the foundations they rest upon, we shall not be able to vindicate our sacred Profession; and that is a thing we shall often be called to, in this Period of universal Inquiry. It should therefore be our ardent concern, perpetually to increase in real understanding. It is our duty to excel as much as possible in the branches of human Science; and especially in the employment more immediately appointed us by Providence. But above all should we grow in the Knowledge of Religion; an exhortation that deserves particularly to be regarded, by those of us who are still in the youthful part of life. The Knowledge of Religion, my Friends, is infinitely more worthy our pursuit, than the tri-

trifling amusements, the false, the dangerous, the destructive pleasures in which the generality of young persons are engaged. This, this it is, which will richly reward our diligent application. Let us then be persuaded to cultivate a solid taste in reading and thinking. It is true, that a taste for reading is the fashion of the day; but it is rendered useless, or worse, by being principally directed to such Compositions as are at best superficial, frequently hurtful. But may it be our care to acquire an acquaintance with that valuable Wisdom, which leads to inward and eternal blessedness. Let us search into the heavenly treasures contained in the Bible, study to know our own hearts, and labour to obtain an insight into the tempers and characters of men. Let us not suffer ourselves to rest in slight attainments; but endeavour to be always rising from improvement to improvement. Be it matter of particular caution with us, to avoid the hindrances of Knowledge. Far be it from us, to let our powers be stupified by indolence; and especially should we remember the observation of Solomon (d): *He that walketh with wise men shall be wise; but a companion of fools shall be destroyed.* Let us embrace with gratitude and zeal every opportunity, and every method by which we may proceed in
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(d) Prov. xiii. 20.

facred Instruction : and let us by no means forget to look up to the great Father of Lights, with earnest supplications that he would dissipate the darkness of our souls, illuminate our breasts with the rays of celestial truth, and *(e) cause us to know the way in which we ought to walk.* Finally, let it be practical Knowledge that employs our principal attention. Let us consider, that it is not an exact System of speculative Principles which will avail to happiness, but the Wisdom that is seated in the heart, as well as the head; the Wisdom which is calculated to inspire the mind with amiable, devout, and godlike affections. For thus, and thus only, shall we be able to sustain the part allotted us in life, with propriety and dignity. Thus only can we lay a foundation for genuine felicity. And thus only shall we be qualified to join with that divine assembly of Angels and glorified Spirits, who are ever advancing to new discoveries, and are ever acquiring new and ravishing enlargements of their faculties. I add,

3. Since it is not good for the Soul to be without Knowledge, we should endeavour to promote the communication of Knowledge in the world. This is not an obligation upon those alone, who are chosen and retained by the people for that purpose, but upon every one of us in our several stations. We are all
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in this respect stewards, who are bound to spread light and truth through our families, through our relatives, and as we have opportunity, among mankind in general. But there is not perhaps much benefit to be done, among those who are grown up, and hardened in iniquity. The rising Generation then, deserves to be principally regarded: and it is the indispensable Duty of Parents, to attend with the utmost diligence, to the pious and virtuous education of their Children. It is a Duty of infinite importance; a Duty they are called to by every argument; a Duty on which the support of Society, as well as the usefulness and happiness of their Off-spring, depends. Every Father therefore, and every Mother who is able to discharge it, should zealously attend to the mighty trust, and watch over the immortal souls committed to their care.

But what is to be done with the Children of such as are incapacitated by ignorance, averse through wickedness, or disabled by poverty, from affording them proper instruction? Must These be left a prey to stupidity and vice? Humanity, Reason, Religion tremble at the thought. Yet such must be the deplorable case of vast multitudes, unless some method is found to prevent it. One of the best methods which the benevolence of man hath pitched upon, in order to remove the
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darkness that must otherwise lie on the minds of Thousands of young Creatures who are continually opening into Being, is the erection of public Schools. It is an Institution of this kind I am now to lay before you ; and I am persuaded you will not deny me your attention, while I read

The PRESENT STATE of the
C H A R I T Y - S C H O O L

in Gravel-Lane, Southwark.

THE Foundation of it was laid in the year 1687. in the reign of King *James* the second, when a school was set up by one *Poulton* a Jesuit, and public notice was given, that he would instruct the Children of the Poor *gratis* : upon which Mr. *Arthur Shallet*, Mr. *Samuel Warburton*, and Mr. *Ferdinando Holland*, laid the Foundation of this School, to avoid the dangerous consequences of a *Popish* one, and provide for the instruction of the Children of the Poor in the *Protestant* way.

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The number of scholars at first was 40. afterwards it increased to 50, and now is 180. They are taught to read, write, and cypher, and are instructed in the principles of our common Christianity: by which means they are qualified for the service of God and Man. It may be said to be the first school the protestant Dissenters were concerned in. Here objects are received without distinction of parties, the common good being alone intended.

It is situated in one of the poorest Parts of this City, and the Children of the poorest sort of Watermen, Fishermen, and others, are taught without any expence to their Parents, and are furnished with Bibles, Testaments, Catechisms, and writing and cyphering Books.

The charges have been defrayed by the gifts and subscriptions of private persons; with an annual collection in this Place, one in the City, and also the year past at *Westminster*; together with the kind Remembrance of the said School by some in their last Wills.

The account you have heard, carries along with it its own recommendation; and shews that it is a generous, useful, and valuable design, to which we at this time ask your
liberal

liberal Contributions. That our hearts should feel for the distresses of others, and that our hands should ever be ready to dispel their wants, and light up the human countenance to joy and happiness, are lessons inculcated by various and mighty motives. The unlimited goodness of God, the compassion he hath interwoven in our frame, the beneficent spirit of the Gospel, the spotless example of Christ, the necessity of mutual affection to the temporal enjoyment and future bliss of mankind, do all loudly demand us to love our Neighbours as ourselves: and these general Arguments for the exercise of kindness to our Fellow-Creatures, may be urged in the present case, with great propriety and force. But it comes recommended by especial and peculiar Considerations. Our benefactions on such an occasion as this, do not only give assistance to the Body, but the Soul: they are instrumental in qualifying the immortal Mind, to support with dignity, the noble part assigned it by the Governor of the Universe. At the same time that we manifest our benevolence to individuals, we afford the best proof of our regard to our Country. The situation of *Great Britain* both as to morals and religion, should strongly persuade our encouragement of the Charity I am now speaking of. There are frequent and pathetick complaints that a dreadful Profligacy

fligacy hath seized the lower sort of people :
 what then can be more necessary than the
 training up of young ones in pious, sober, and
 virtuous principles ? We are often told, that
 Popery increases daily ; and that it increases
 chiefly among the Poor : What then can be
 more important than to teach those Scrip-
 tures, which are so essentially opposite to
 that Diabolical Scheme ? Consider the ad-
 vantage you put into the hands of these pre-
 sent Objects of your tenderness. You put
 into their hands the Gospel of life ; that
 Gospel which will instruct them to be faithful
 servants, affectionate relatives, friendly neigh-
 bours, and peaceful members of society ; that
 Gospel which will guide their feet in the path
 of everlasting blessedness. What an amazing
 difference is there between a Soul that is
 plunged in ignorance and wickedness, and
 one that understands the grand points of du-
 ty, applies to the practice of them, and
 maintains an amiable character in life ! While
 the former is a shocking and wretched spec-
 tacle, miserable for this world, and misera-
 ble for that which to come ; the latter, how-
 ever low, however mean, however desti-
 tute, however despised, is an honourable Be-
 ing, a favourite of God, and an heir of
 Glory.

It is an additional and powerful recom-
 mendation of the present Charity, that it is
 not

not formed upon narrow views, or confined to a peculiar Party. It only seeks to make those who partake of it, good Men, good Christians, and good Protestants. All that is required of the Children, is regularly to attend some kind of public worship ; and much the larger number of them belong to the established Church.

Is there not something in the very appearance of these little ones now before you, that suggests a prevailing motive to beneficence ? Do not their decent behaviour, their modest looks, their yet uncorrupted minds, with silent but persuasive language, plead feelingly in their behalf ? Can you reflect that some of them must have been left in the grossest Darkness, without your aid ; can you think that others of them may be rescued from Folly, from Vice, from Ruin by your Liberality ; without being touched with all the softness of Pity, and warmed with all the ardour of Benevolence ?

But I forget that I am accumulating arguments on those who need them not ; and urging sentiments upon you, with which you are already inspired, and which have brought you into this Place. Instead therefore of exhorting you to what you are previously determined to perform, it rather behoves

hoves me to thank you in the name of these helpless objects, whom you have taken into your protection ; and to congratulate your being animated with such godlike dispositions. Yes, I do congratulate your having chosen to begin the new Year, in so wise and worthy a manner. May you continue to abound in every good work ! May your abilities increase with your desires to be useful ! May your growing lives be crowned with growing felicity ; and may you at length arrive to those happy Mansions, where your labours of love shall meet with an ample and an eternal reward ! *Amen.*

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